

Preface

The Congo Basin forest in Central Africa is the second largest continuous tropical forest after the Amazon. It covers nearly 240 million hectares and is shared between six countries: Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. It is home to and provides livelihoods for over 75 million people.

Government efforts in forest governance, difficult access and lack of infrastructure have helped protect the forest cover in this region of the world for a long time. Therefore, the forests of the Congo Basin form one of the last reserves of biodiversity where primary forests are interconnected and provide essential ecosystem services.

They are of great value to the global community because their huge carbon stocks help reduce global warming and climate change. The forests are a huge source of fresh water, which is increasingly scarce on the planet. Moreover, for local communities and “Indigenous Peoples”, the forest is not only an economic asset, but it is also the main source of their identity, a place of reflection and rituals.

At the same time, the forest ecosystems of the Congo Basin are now facing several threats of collapse, linked to overexploitation of timber and mineral resources, illegal trade in biodiversity and the appetites of the agro-industry. This requires urgent and concerted action with stakeholders, among whom Asian operators increasingly occupy a position of essential discussion partners. In this regard, thanks to the convergence plan of the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC), we are witnessing the continued implementation of concerted measures between governments, supported by



international cooperation, which contribute to an ongoing improvement of forest governance in the sub-region. Let us refer to the declaration dated September 26, 2018, of His Excellency Ali BONGO, President of the Republic of Gabon who, from the forest site of Mevang, set the objective that all Gabonese forest concessions be certified by 2022.

This commitment, which deserves to be followed by the other countries of the sub-region, has mobilized companies in Gabon, in particular Asian companies, to make rapid progress in their operating and transformation practices, in respect to relationships with indigenous populations and the protection of biodiversity. In addition, the sustainable management of forest concessions guarantees a constant availability of timber in the future.

The trade sector and end consumers are therefore willing to participate in this sustainable management effort and buy and use only certified wood, provided that they are informed and made aware of the crucial importance, for humanity, of preserving these forests “forever”. May this work by publisher Meindert Brouwer contribute to it.

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